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'TOMORROW'S DAWN'

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Portugal

THE third triennial camellia show in Vigo, which was the eighth annual show in Galicia, was by any standards very remarkable. I have never seen so much excitement generated at any camellia show, and I have seen most of them in the various camellia-growing countries. Coverage by the Spanish Press was continued for three days, with many photographs, and the show was televised and featured on the radio. The winner of this show gets the full treatment, flying his national flag, hot television lamps, flash-lights, champagne and oysters, hundreds of friendly handshakes, and even autograph hunters.

Public interest was very keen, and the huge building, the largest I have ever seen used for a camellia show, was packed even in the gangways, on the second day, when the prizes were presented. This keen interest extended to school children.

The show was held from the 26th to the 29th February, 1972, in a large, modern, covered sports stadium. Unlike most of such stadia, with their hideous girders and depressing functional appearance, this building is beautiful, and made an excellent setting for the show.

The oval stadium was divided lengthwise and the whole of one half of the spectator area was banked right up to the roof with a staggering quantity of sphagnum moss. I collected similar moss for the boxes in which my own flowers travelled to Vigo from Portugal, and knowing how long it took to collect this small quantity, I marvelled at the effort made by the organisers of the show. In the banked up moss were set various groups of camellias, conifers and agaves. This made a splendid background for the large stage erected in the centre at the back section on which was given a performance of traditional dances and music by the Ballet Gallego (Galician Ballet) on the second day when the prizes were presented.

The wings and surroundings of the stage were covered with conifer foliage, relieved here and there with branches of mimosa and red rhododendrons. The effect was much like an open-air theatre, and this greatly enhanced the performance of the dancers in their traditional costumes.

On the carpeted floor of the stadium were arranged long banked tables for the camellia blooms and floral arrangements, with camellia plants around the perimeter. The tables were covered with moss which concealed a wire grille above shallow water tanks, which were under the tables for the flower stems.

The arrangement of this show is as follows. There are seven classes (a) White, (b) Pink, (c) Red, (d) Variegated (e) Any class or colour distinct from the foregoing, (f) a floral arrangement, and (g) Plants in flower. Any number of varieties may be entered in one class, but in classes (a), (b), (c) and (d) a minimum of three blooms of each variety must be shown. In fact few exhibitors restricted themselves to three blooms of each variety in these four classes, but put in many blooms. Moreover they were not content merely to place them in the moss on the bench, but wove them with wire, moss and foliage into designs, baskets, wreaths, etc., using sometimes a hundred blooms or more.

This eagerness to create a design with camellias was given full opportunity in class (f) and some interesting objects were combined with camellias to create decorative effects. Many arrangements were not to my taste because of the unrestrained mixture of colours, but the winner of this class did not make this mistake. She arranged only one variety, 'Incarnata,' on a large and beautiful piece of smooth white coral.

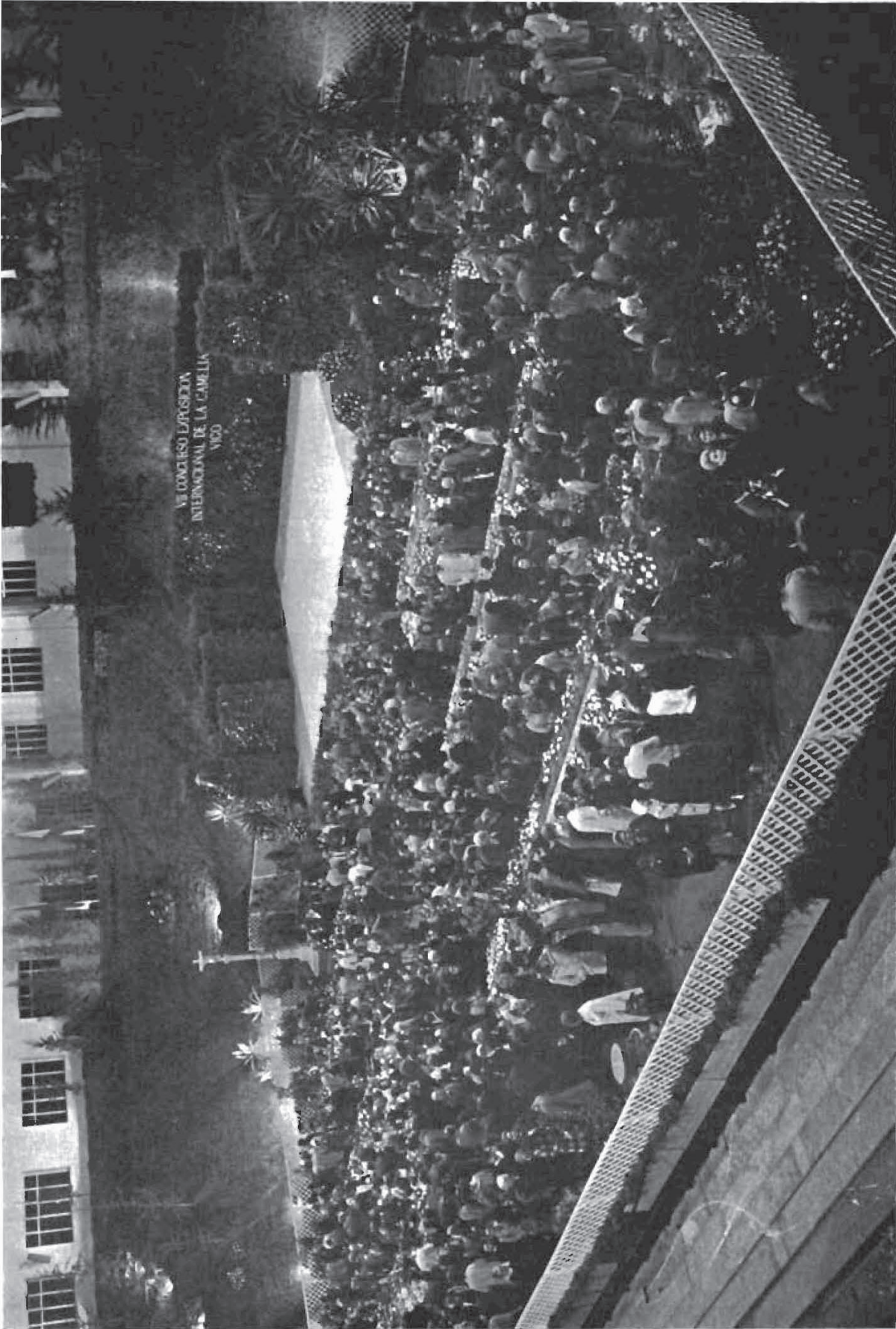
The favourite camellia in Spain is the white formal double 'Alba Plena,' which is very good in North Spain, better than in Portugal. This is because the temperature never falls below zero Centigrade in Vigo, and there is more rain in summer. Even so it was surprising to see so many perfect white blooms in any one exhibit (the winner in class (a) displayed hundreds), after the cyclone which did so much damage in Spain and Portugal on the 5th February. Presumably these perfect flowers are found in the sheltered centre of very large camellia trees in old gardens.

There were many prizes, to be retained permanently, and apart from the grand prix and a crystal vase, they were all beautifully fashioned pieces of silverware in many artistic designs, created by Spanish silversmiths specially for the show. They were presented by aristocrats, cabinet ministers, and so on, and the premier trophy, the Gold Camellia, was given by Her Excellency Carmen Polo de Franco (wife of Generalissimo Franco).

The manner of awarding the prizes was interesting and merits careful consideration by organisers of competitions everywhere. The system was to award the Gold Camellia to the most successful exhibitor, and the individual trophies which he would have won under the usual system were given to the runners-up in those classes, while the third received second prizes, and so on. This is an excellent idea, as it prevents any one exhibitor from walking away with too many prizes, and encourages more competitors to have a go even if they do not expect to win. In this exhibition, only the third held in Vigo, there were 70 competitors who displayed about 500 groups, and with so much publicity there are sure to be more next time.

Each competitor had as much space as he required and placed all his exhibits (except shrubs) together. This made it much easier for exhibitors, but difficult for the judges when they were judging individual classes. They must have done a lot of running backwards and forwards. On the other hand it made it easier for them to choose the most successful display overall.

The judges had food for thought with one exhibit in class (e), as the flowers were pale yellow, and labelled 'Sol Naciendo' (Rising Sun), a variety they had not encountered before. They pondered on the fact that the flowers bore a strong resemblance to 'Alba Plena' in form, and also the fact that the



The private view of the Vigo Show immediately after the judging.

exhibitor was the wife of a Doctor of Chemistry. Her name was Donna Paz de Madariaga y Oya, but I will call her "Bachi," a nickname used by her friends.

The judging panel included an authority on the genus, Don Antonio Odriozola, who has an extensive knowledge of camellias of all colours, and he was given the delicate task of clarifying this matter with the charming but temperamental exhibitor. The following conversation took place.

Odriozola: "These flowers are very beautiful".

Bachi: "I am glad you like them".

Odriozola: "But I would like to see the tree which produces these flowers."

Bachi: "So would I!"

Bachi told me that she had been experimenting for three years with the colouring of white camellias, and yellow was difficult because it usually came streaky, but she had often worn flowers tinted to other colours as a corsage.

The display as a whole of Alfredo Moreira da Silva Ltd., of Oporto, Portugal, was placed second, and a beautiful silver trophy was awarded. At the previous Vigo show in 1969 they were awarded the Gold Camellia, and as I write I have just received news that this trophy has been stolen. It is indeed dismaying to think of such a rare and lovely thing being melted down for the metal.

The Gold Camellia is a superb example of the jeweller's art which causes gasps of admiration wherever it is seen. It is a sprig of camellia slightly under life size, exquisitely wrought in gold and set on a base of dark green marble.

A wealthy American who was fascinated by it ordered a replica to be made by the jeweller, the price did not matter. The jeweller consulted the Committee, who told him to make a silver replica and to advise the client that the only way he could obtain the Gold Camellia was to bring his camellias to Vigo and win it. This of course is possible nowadays. In fact in a jet plane the flowers would have had a smoother ride than some others did, carried in lorries over roads some of which were of cobbled granite.

As the winning stand was my own I personally can offer no opinion as to its value or appeal, but a description will not be out of place. This exhibit covered the whole of one bench, and in each of section (a), (b), (c) and (d), the new cultivars of *C. japonica*, mainly from America and Australia, contrasted with old un-named varieties from trees in my garden in Portugal. Some of these old camellias did not suffer by comparison with the new varieties, and I wish some expert would come along and name them for me.

Section (e) was devoted to hybrids which involved a wide range of parentage, and this resulted in a wide variation of flowers, from the delicate 'Tiny Princess' (*C. fraterna* x *C. japonica*), to the rather gross 'Howard Asper' (*C. reticulata* x *C. japonica*). This section was extended by a separate group of *C. williamsii* hybrids (*C. saluenensis* x *C. japonica*) ranging from the original and first hybrid 'J. C. Williams', to eye-catching modern varieties such as 'Brigadoon', 'Galaxie' and 'Julia Hamiter'.